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Westwood Sixth Graders

Pupils 'Talk Back' to Computer

By EDIE BROWN

FO + CAL = FOCAL.

The mathematical equation explains the origin of a unique language, FOrmula CALculator, "understood" by a computer used by students in mathematics at the Islington School in Westwood.

Sixth graders at the school are learning to "talk" the language in an attempt to simulate mathematical models, plot curves, and solve other numerical problems.

"It is a supplement, a teaching tool, a way of getting youngsters to be creative and to stimulate them in math areas," explained C. Louis Cedrone, assistant superintendent of schools.

The time-shared computer, a PDP 8-1, is installed at the high school and connected to a time-shared teletype at the Islington School. Once a student masters the FOCAL language, he can punch information into the teletype. The information is then fed into the computer at the high school and the answers return in a matter of seconds.

"The kids are really enthusiastic about it," said Arthur Gearty, the teacher who has been instructing the students in FOCAL. "They come as early as 45 minutes before school and stay after school for as long as we let them."

Forty-eight students have been programmed in the computer language since the instruction began this fall. Gearty plans to have all the school's 120 students participating in the program by the end of the year.

Some $2075 in financial support for the program comes from the state department of education for computer education at the elementary level.

The computer at the high school is used in Project LOCAL, a cooperative project offering computer math at the secondary level in five other area towns.

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